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WASHINGTON POST
15 MARCH 1983

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Thurmond Foe Says He's Being Railroaded

A man who told a Washington grand jury he had seen Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) accept two \$10,000 cash payments claims he is being railroaded to prison because of his sworn testimony.

The man is William W. Pearce, and the circumstances of his indictment, arrest and incarceration are indeed peculiar. Here's the story:

Pearce was hired by ex-CIA agent Edwin P. Wilson, now a twice-convicted felon. At one point, Pearce was asked to spy on another Wilson associate. Pearce swears he saw the associate deliver payments to Thurmond on two separate occasions at the Capitol Hill Club in Washington.

Pearce also had a full-time job with Honeywell Inc., which was unaware of his work for Wilson. When company officials heard of the connection between Pearce and Wilson, they questioned Pearce about it and secured his dismissal in April, 1982.

Pearce sued Honeywell over what he said was a forced resignation; Honeywell countersued, claiming Pearce defrauded it on some billings. The matter dragged on.

Then on Feb. 2 and 3, I reported Pearce's charges about the alleged Thurmond payments. On Feb. 8, Pearce met with Honeywell attorney John Lucas. He says Lucas wanted to settle the legal dispute.

Pearce said he agreed to drop his suit when Lucas promised Honeywell would drop the countersuit.

On Feb. 10, Pearce appeared before the grand jury and gave sworn testimony about the alleged payoffs to Thurmond.

On Feb. 15, Pearce was indicted by a federal grand jury in Norfolk on six counts of defrauding Honeywell.

On Feb. 17, two U.S. marshals showed up at Pearce's Virginia Beach, Va., home. Pearce was not there. The marshals showed his son, Todd, 18, a writ of attachment on the house, which allowed them to make an inventory of its contents as part of Honeywell's civil suit.

In an unusual move, Lucas, the Honeywell attorney, accompanied the marshals and was allowed to go through the house, too. Pearce said his son saw Lucas examine the contents of a desk drawer.

A spokesman for the marshals said they didn't see the attorney rummaging through Pearce's belongings. But there is some question whether Lucas was in their sight at all times, and Pearce says the only explanation for Honeywell's subsequent attachment of one of his bank accounts is that the attorney found

the account number among Pearce's private papers. Lucas said he couldn't comment on any aspect of the case because it is in litigation.

On Feb. 18, Pearce called U.S. District Court Judge J. Calvitt Clarke Jr. to complain. It was Clarke who had signed the order stating that the marshals must take the Honeywell attorney with them to the Pearce home.

The following day, Pearce arrived at court in Norfolk ahead of his lawyer, and was confronted by a man who said he was an FBI agent. The man showed no identification and served no legal papers on Pearce, but informed him he was under arrest. He didn't say what the charges were, nor did he read Pearce his rights.

The agent seemed to know about the Thurmond matter. He also boasted that he knew "more about me than my mother or father [did]," Pearce recalled.

After that day's attachment proceedings before Clarke, another judge ordered Pearce held on \$100,000 bond in the fraud case. Pearce has no criminal record, and the amount of the alleged fraud is less than \$100,000.

"It might as well have been \$1 billion, since all my money was tied up," Pearce said. He was taken to the Virginia Beach jail, where he spent several days until his family scraped up a portion of the bail money and he was released.